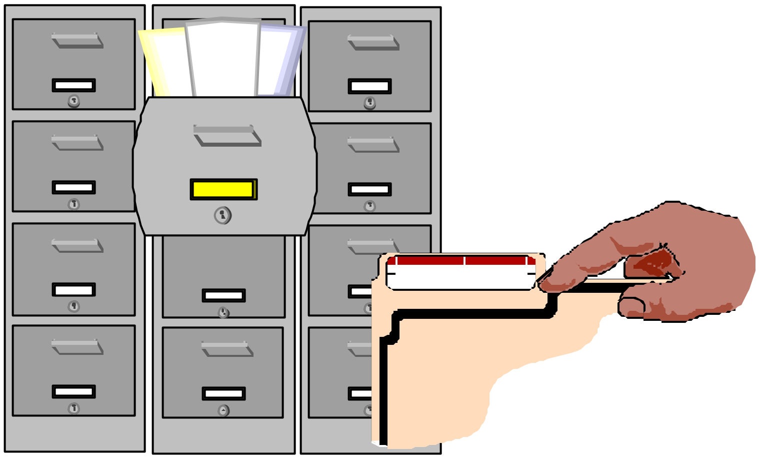
Preservation and Filing of Paper Based Arizona Government Records



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PROVIDING ACCESS
Preserving Arizona

Chapter 1 – Active Files

PRESERVATION

The definition of a “record” found in A.R.S. §41-1350 says that the document is “preserved.” This act of preservation separates records from non-record transitory materials of little or no value. For paper records the act of preservation is the filing of the record in a manner that will make locating it in the future relatively simple and straight forward. After all, the purpose of this preservation is future use.

RESOURCES

Effectively maintaining active files is an activity that is frequently very under-rated. Especially, the act of setting up a file system may be very complex. Many texts, guidelines and standards are available on various aspects of filing paper-based records. Many of these are published by or available from the Association of Records Managers and Administrators International (ARMA International). Published materials are also available via inter-library loan from the Arizona State Library professional collection.

ACTIVE AND INACTIVE FILES

Many records have active and inactive stages in their lifecycle. For purposes of records retention there is one file series for these records. However, for filing purposes, active and inactive files are generally maintained separately. Inactive files frequently move to a records center for more economical storage. Inactive records are generally in their final stage of “life.” The next stage (following inactive status) is generally into the recycle bin.

SYSTEMATIC FILING

A predefined and planned filing system is necessary for records to be preserved and located effectively. Whether a simple filing arrangement, such as filing by straight sequential numbers, or a more sophisticated arrangement, such as coded subject files, the files must be looked at as a system.

A system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. A filing system as an established series of procedures that bring together various filing activities into a practical and workable whole. A filing system ideally has an established written procedure or file plan. This plan explains how the files are to be organized, maintained and controlled. The resultant filing system will enable the file user to find the needed record when it is required and will provide control over that record while it is out of the file.

FILING GOALS

The goal of every filing system is the organization of information in such a way that the user with a question knows where to find the answer. The goal of every records keeper is to find every record in the right place, at the right time, in the right order and to place it in the hands of the proper person at the lowest possible cost.

Finding a folder in the files or placing a paper in the right folder seems a simple matter until something cannot be found or until something is misfiled. The adoption of a standard filing plan and standardized filing procedures will greatly enhance the record keeper's ability to file a record and to find it when necessary.

THE TASK OF OFFICE FILING

Office filing is not usually given the emphasis it deserves as an office function. Yet the files contain the documentation of work accomplished by the office and records required by statute and/or regulation.

Office filing is an important task and must be performed properly to ensure that valuable records will be available when they are needed. The balance of this chapter will help you to:

- Determine which materials to avoid filing.
- Determine which needed documents to maintain as separate file groups.
- Arrange file folders logically within a file group.
- Determine file space requirements.
- Prevent misfiling.
- Know how and when to cross reference files.
- Know how and when to dispose of files.

COOPERATION - A REQUISITE

Cooperation between the record keeper and the records user(s) is essential to proper file maintenance. It has been found that the best filing situation exists when:

- The designated record keeper is given exclusive responsibility for placing materials into the files.
- The record keeper is allowed enough time from other duties to maintain the files properly and to move non-current records into inactive status in accordance with retention and disposition schedules.
- The user complies with file rules such as prompt release of records for filing and using charge out cards when removing records from the file.

This partnership of record keeper with record user creates a healthy file situation, mutually beneficial to all concerned.

NEEDLESS FILING

A careful look at the typical documents in the files of any office will divulge that many should not have been put there the first place. Many "knowledge workers" routinely place *all* incoming and outgoing documents, regardless of their importance, into the files instead of dropping those needless papers into the wastebasket. Many, especially managers and professionals, leave the "file / do not file" decision up to someone else; someone who usually is not as knowledgeable about the need as they are. Indiscriminate filing is one of our least productive tasks. Filing those unneeded papers is costly because manpower and equipment is wasted.

The creation and maintenance of files is a very costly endeavor. In 1997, it was estimated that it cost nearly $40,000 to create the correspondence documents in one file drawer. And the annual cost to maintain one four drawer file cabinet exceeds $2,100. These costs make it imperative that continuing attention and direction be given to the day to day operation of the files.

The following are some methods used to reduce needless filing:

1. **Filing Fewer Publications.** A sure way for an office to reduce needless filing is to begin with the periodicals, circulars and other printed items received for general information.
    a. Maintain them as separate reference files and establish a revolving file whereby the oldest issue is discarded when the latest is added.
    b. At least once a year weed out obsolete materials, especially materials that have been revised.
2. **Filing (Not Filing) Routine Communications.** Received copies of letters and memos, that are intended only to keep staff informed, or request general information, usually should not be filed. Eliminate file copies of routine communications which do not require action or response.
    - When granting routine requests for materials or for routine information, attach the requesting letters to the materials sent. Since this returns the incoming document to the sender there is nothing to be filed.
    - When appropriate, answer a routine request by placing the information at the bottom of the request and returning the original request.
    - When transmitting materials not requested by letter avoid routing transmittal letters with their attendant file copies. Instead show necessary information on a route slip.
    - When using form letters, if possible, return the request for information with the appropriate form letter.
3. **Reduce the Extra Copy Files.** Too many offices set up extra copy files. These might include the copies employees keep of all papers they have prepared; the "name" file (in which an extra copy of a document is filed even though the primary reference might be a project file or the subject file); or the "date" file, in which an extra copy is filed by its preparation date. These files are maintained *just in case* the record cannot be found in the main file. Another file that is frequently maintained is the "reading file" which is circulated for information only, but then retained as a separate file. ***It is best to eliminate extra copy files wherever possible.***
4. **Reduce Distribution.** While State and local agencies cannot afford communication gaps, neither can they forget that in most offices yesterday's desired information copy may have become today's filing nuisance. Probably the most effective way to limit needless filing is by reducing copy distribution.

FILE GROUPS / RECORD SERIES

Records are divided into basic file types, or groups. A file group, frequently referred to as a record series, consists of a collection of documents that have similar characteristics and are filed apart from other groups of records.

The primary reason for separating files into the basic groups is to help in locating a particular record or document. This separation aids locating a document because it immediately reduces the area of search.

There are many possibilities for dividing the records into separate file groups. The following represent some typical break downs:

1. **General Correspondence (Subject) Files.** Although subject files will normally constitute less than 20% of all office records, their maintenance is one of the most critical filing tasks. This file consists of letters, memorandums, enclosures, reports and miscellaneous materials best arranged by subject. Almost every office requires a file of this type for those papers which will most often be requested by subject.
2. **Case (Project) Files.** These files reflect the case history of a project, person or activity. They consist of a series of related actions concerning a person, organization, location, product or thing, e.g., contract case files, personnel files, project files, etc. A case file normally documents a series of transactions or a relationship from beginning to end. These documents may cover one or many subjects. They are terminated upon the occurrence of an event such as contract completion, retirement of an individual or completion of a project. These records are always filed by a name or a number. This aids in distinguishing them from the general correspondence which is usually filed by subject.
3. **Case (Project) Working Papers.** These are short lived correspondence and working papers accumulated in connection with specific case files. They include background and working materials such as reference materials and data obtained for the case or project, data analysis and summaries, drafts, and

other preliminary papers leading to final results or findings. The most common type of working papers are routine requests for reports or data on the case, routine correspondence concerning the administration of the case, extra copies of documents or reference materials. These documents should be segregated from the actual case records.

4. **Routine Transitory Material.** These are short-lived files that involve routine information and are not of continuing reference value. They consist of transmittal or form letters, requests for routine information, publications or other material that does not require action by the receiving office. Usually a separate transitory file is established.
5. **Reference Materials.** These materials may include copies of publications, reports, studies, periodicals, etc., required by the accumulating office as a technical reference library. Only those that are current and of significant value should be retained and filed. Reference materials are best segregated from the office files and retained separately.
6. **Document Files.** Individual documents or groups of like documents, performing the same function or reflecting similar or comparable transactions, are frequently filed together. Examples include purchase requests, invoices, and time and leave records.
7. **Extra Copy (Convenience) Files.** These are redundant copies of documents created or received by an office, and are filed in addition to the “official” file. Date files and author files are typical examples. Generally, this file falls into the category of "needless filing."
8. **Non Standard Size Records.** Records such as card files, large maps and charts, photographs, microfilm, audio or video tapes, etc., are usually filed separately when their size and shape preclude filing with standard size records.

Chapter 2 – Arranging Files

ARRANGEMENT METHODS

All manual filing systems are developed from three basic methods. They are:

- Alphabetic
- Numeric
- Alphanumeric

Filing by subject, name, location, document number, file number, data, or combination of these are derived from the three basic methods. The alphabetic method includes subject (correspondence files), name files, case files, named project files, or document files. Numeric filing includes straight numeric, duplex numeric schemes (including middle and terminal digit), decimal systems and chronological filing systems. Alphanumeric filing includes subject-numeric systems and phonetic systems.

The filing arrangement chosen for a file is frequently dependent on the filing feature which is most often expected to be known by the user of the file. However, in an established file the feature used to file the document is dependent on the filing arrangement being employed. Once that feature is chosen, it must always be used to maintain consistency. Typical filing features include:

- The subject of the document
- The recipient
- The author
- The document name (for reports, manuscripts, etc.)

ALPHABETIC ARRANGEMENTS

All too often it is assumed that the only knowledge needed to file alphabetically is to understand the order of the alphabet. This may work fine in simplistic situations, but realistically much more is needed.

The term "alphabetic file" usually refers to a name file relating to persons, places, or things which are arranged in alphabetical order. Filing by name in large case files is not as simple as it may seem. The problem is consistency. Names with vowels dropped from them, possessives, names containing compass terms or numerals, compound words, hyphenated surnames, and name appendages require the implementation of specific rules.

There is actually an American National Standards Institute standard (ANSI/ARMA 1-1995) entitled “Alphabetic Filing Rules.” This standard is available from ARMA International at their website, www.arma.org. It is also available via inter-library loan from the Arizona State Library professional collection. This publication contains the rules best followed for filing documents and records in an alphabetical sequence.

NUMERIC ARRANGEMENTS

Numeric filing will usually prove most efficient when used to arrange records normally identified and referred to by number such as invoices, contracts, numbered projects, legal case files, patient medical records, requisitions, licenses, checks, etc. Filing and finding is faster in a numeric file than in most other arrangements. Numbers or symbols are so much shorter than word designations. Numeric file codes are frequently associated with subject files. Numeric or alphanumeric codes are substitutes for lengthy file designations otherwise expressed as words. When these codes are used there must be an alphabetical cross index, classification record or listing that controls the numbers.

1. **Serial or Straight Numeric.** This is the conventional method of numerically arranged files. The numbers are arranged in their normal sequence, e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. Numbers are assigned as records are created, with the newest records having the highest number. Anyone who can count, can become proficient in working with a straight numeric system. A major disadvantage with this system is that the most active files, usually the newest ones, are in a confined area. Frequent referral produces time consuming congestion when more than one person requires access. Another disadvantage reveals itself when the files are purged of the oldest records. Those records are all located in one area. When they are removed large gaps are left in the filing equipment. If the straight numerical sequence is to be retained, the files must be moved up to fill in the gaps so that space is available for incoming files.
2. **Duplex Numeric.** A duplex number consists of two or more parts, separated by a dash, space, or a comma. For example: 611-201, 096 10 2594; 1401-02; 100, 200, 300. Case papers are arranged in straight numeric sequence by the first part of the number and thereafter by succeeding parts of the number. For example: papers numbered 36-1- 1, 1-100-2, and 30-99-60 would be arranged as follows: 1-100-2, 30- 99-60, and 36-1-1.
3. **Terminal Digit.** The basic difference between terminal digit numbering and conventional numbering systems is that with a terminal digit system, the numbers are read in reverse order by groups of 2 digits. For example, rather than reading the number 174516 from left to right, it is read from right to left in groups of two digits:

16	45	17
Terminal Digits	**Middle Digits**	**Tertiary Digits**

A record would be filed first by its terminal digits **(16)**, then by its middle digits **(45)**, and finally by its tertiary digits **(17)**. Therefore, to find 174516 we would go first to the *16* section of the file then to the *45* subsection where **174516 will be found between 164516 and 184516**. A terminal digit system is designed for use on files which are being assigned numbers in sequence. The terminal digit system allows for an even distribution of the most active (most recent) records within the file by distributing them throughout the file rather than by bunching them into one area. This facilitates faster and easier retrieval and refiling of records within the file and also simplifies the retirement of records to inactive status. Terminal digit filing is most suited to high volume, high activity case files which are being assigned numbers in sequence as the files are created. A typical terminal digit application is hospital medical records or insurance policy files. However, any files of a similar nature are ideal for terminal digit filing.

4. **Decimal.** This is a variation of the Dewey Decimal System. All topics are divided into major divisions each of which is divided into parts, which can be further subdivided into smaller parts.
5. **Chronological Arrangement.** This system is used to arrange files in date sequence when the date is the primary means of reference. It is a useful method of keeping documents in small manageable groups, usually by day, month and year. Although very few files are arranged primarily by date, almost all papers within a folder, in any file arrangement are in chronological sequence, usually in reverse order. Transitory and suspense files are examples of records that are arranged primarily by date.
6. **Geographical (Location) Arrangement.** In this arrangement, documents are filed by geographical location such as area, country, state, county, etc. It is used when the geographical location is the primary means of reference. Locations may range from broad geographic or political areas to very precise subdivisions.
7. **Organizational Arrangement.** This arrangement is used when the name of the pertinent organization is the primary reference. It is essentially an arrangement of organizations as they relate to each other. These organizations are further arranged by particular levels of authority and then by subordinate levels arranged alphabetically and/or numerically.

Chapter 3 - Subject Filing

WHAT IS SUBJECT FILING?

Subject filing is the arranging of documentary material by a given subject; it is filing by descriptive feature instead of by name or location. This file arrangement is for records significant for their informational content rather than for the names of correspondents. Qualified, dedicated and skilled people are required to maintain a subject filing system; but when properly set up and carefully maintained it virtually assures finding a record promptly when it is needed.

In the subject file, most documents are filed by what they are about rather than who sent them or where they came from. This requires the classification, or systematic arrangement of subjects into groups or categories based on some definite scheme of natural relationship. A subject arrangement based upon function usually provides the key to logical files classification. Functions usually represent the most significant work areas of an organization, but do not necessarily represent the organizational structure of that organization.

A subject filing system can be difficult to set up and organize because no two people think exactly alike about any one topic. A good system requires extensive study of the organization and familiarity with its functions. The purpose of the subject file is to keep records in such a manner that users can readily obtain them.

FILE PLANS

The best way to ensure that the subjects used for filing in a subjectively arranged file remain constant is to have a written subject file plan. The plan is essentially a hierarchical (a series graded by rank) outline of various subjects and sub-subjects. These plans are frequently coded (numerically or alpha-numerically) so that each subject has its own code.

Usually, the subject topic chosen as the file designator of a document should reflect its informational content. Nearly every document has one or more key sentences that relate it to an action or transaction. The record keeper must derive the best description of the subject matter from these sentences. Frequently, the selected descriptive word may not match the wording on any of the folder labels. A letter may be about "pencils," but there have been too few documents about "pencils" to require a separate folder for them. The logical home for such a letter might then be a folder with a much broader term such as "office supplies."

Often topics included in subject filing systems are not so much subject centered as document centered. The "subject" for filing purpose could be the name of an organization originating the document and may not represent the subject content at all. Other documents may be filed by some characteristics or form title, for example, "press releases, merchandise vouchers, position descriptions." Although they may not be related to the subject matter, they are filed by the way people ask for them.

ENTERPRISE WIDE

A file plan will work best when it encompasses the entire organization. Under this situation all offices use the same subject headings and file arrangement. Thus, an individual may transfer from one office to another and never have to learn a new subject filing system.

Subject file plans are frequently agency-wide plans. First developed at U.S. federal agencies, subject file plans are used by all branches of the military. By having an enterprise wide subject file plan the files are essentially the same throughout the agency. As an example the files at Luke Air Force Base in Glendale, AZ use the same plan as the files at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. The advantage is that personnel need only learn one file plan for their entire term of service in the Air Force.

ORGANIZATION OF THE FILES

There are three essential points to consider in the subject organization and operation of subject files. They are choice of heading, making the index, and use of a cross reference.

1. **Choice of Subject Heading.** Identifying and defining the essential headings to conform to the possible request for filed information requires great care if the system is to function satisfactorily. A good subject classification system should consist of the following:
    - Classification of records should be divided into hierarchical segments: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary
      Example:
      Primary - "Civil Rights"
      Secondary - "Equal Employment Opportunity"
      Tertiary - "Affirmative Action"
    - All divisions chosen must be significant to bring related subjects together.
    - All divisions must be mutually exclusive, they must be clearly descriptive to prevent overlapping of divisions.
    - All divisions must be clearly defined to avoid misinterpretation.
    - There must be a division for every class or subdivision of records.

Utilizing the above will help to eliminate the basic problem in subject filing, "determining the subject under which each given item should be filed so that it can be retrieved immediately when needed." The subject heading should be brief and concise, accurately descriptive, technically correct, and capable of only one interpretation.

It is important that all classes of information on a specific subject or activity be brought together in one broad grouping under a main subject in the proper divisions rather than to divide into too many general subjects and excessive subdivisions.

2. **Index.** Every subject file, no matter how small, must be accompanied by a written list or index of subjects used. The requirements of a good index:
    - It should be standardized.
    - It must be flexible to allow for growth and the eventual inclusion of entirely new material.
    - It must be understandable by all who use it.
    - Keep it simple and standardized - KISS.

An alphabetic index for a subject file is recommended. It is valuable in that a quick review of all subjects used can be made when a new heading is to be chosen. It is also valuable in finding the correct heading under which material is stored when it is asked for by an unusual subject title.

3. **Cross Referencing.** Cross referencing facilitates locating papers in the subject file system. More cross references are used in subject filing than in any other type of file. The reason is that much of the documentation in the subject file may refer to more than one subject.

THE NAME INDEX

In some filing situations, needed records can be found more rapidly by maintaining a separate *Name Index* to the subject file. This Index is arranged alphabetically by names of persons or organizations referred to in correspondence or documents.

When to use. When planning a subject file, the record keeper should consider establishing a separate alphabetic Name Index when the following conditions are present:

- Records are frequently requested by the names of individuals or organizations concerned, rather than by subject.
- Most of the material consists of correspondence covering a wide variety of subjects among many persons or organizations outside the agency. However, if these records are not filed by subject, but are, for example, case files sub-arranged alphabetically by names within the subject file, then an alphabetic Name Index is not needed.
- The quantity of subject filed material is large, perhaps more than one file cabinet (100 file/inches) a year. In small subject files the record keeper usually can locate needed records without a Name Index.

Offices should not hesitate to discontinue an alphabetic Name Index that is little used. The fact that it occasionally helps to locate a requested document becomes a managerial decision of weighing cost versus benefits.

How to establish. If needed, the Index should be letter size. It should consist of extra copies of outgoing letters of distinctive color, a copy produced by an office copier, or letter size cross reference forms.

The work of keeping up a Name Index can be reduced if a limit is placed on the type of letters for which extra index copies are made. For example, the types of communications most often asked for by name are those addressed to specific supervisors in the department and to important officials. Consequently, Name Index copies are needed only for correspondence with these persons.

When the record keeper marks the subject copy for filing, he should at the same time also mark the Name Index copy. The file designation of the subject file copy should be marked in the upper right corner of the Name Index copy. Also the name or title under which the Index copy will be filed should be underscored. The following are examples of underscoring various types of names or titles on the Name Index copy:

- Correspondence with private individuals should be filed by the last name of the individual addressed:

  Mrs. Mary **Brown**
  1330 Ivy Street
  Seattle, Washington 98105

- Correspondence with officials of commercial concerns should be filed under the name of the company or organization. In the example given below, if the manager of the company is better known than the company, a cross-reference under "Dough" might be advisable:

  Mr. John Dough, Manager
  Crusty Baking Corporation
  Chicago, Illinois 60680

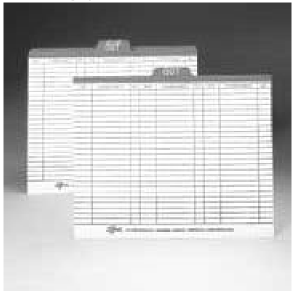
Chapter 4 - Control & Maintenance

FILE CONTROLS

For a file to be efficient and useful, certain controls must be exercised to insure its integrity. Misfiles and lost files can ruin an otherwise sound filing system.

Searching for misfiled records is time consuming and costly. In most cases the misfile could have been easily prevented. *First,* the record should be filed in its proper place through the use of a good file system and adherence to established filing rules. *Second,* the use of a charge-out system employing "out" cards and/or computer generated check-out labels allows for control over those records removed from the file, and also is a valuable aid for refiling the record. *Third,* other file controls such as file guides, folder tab locations and color coding are valuable measures.

FILE AND DOCUMENT CHECK-OUT



An **"out" card** or other check-out method is strongly recommended whenever a record is removed from the file. The record that is "borrowed for just a minute" without being checked-out becomes the lost record.

This "out" card should contain the name of the file or document, who the record was given to, and the date it was checked-out. The "out" card is then placed in the file in place of the record. In larger files a follow-up system is advisable. A card tickler file works well. A 3x5 card is made up for each check-out and filed in chronological order. After a given length of time an inquiry is made as to the return of the checked-out record to the file. Automated file control systems, most utilizing bar-coding of file folders and check-out documentation, are available from commercial filing systems vendors.

For files with high priority information not found elsewhere, or confidential information, very tight controls may be required. A closed file area with access by specifically assigned individuals is a good policy for this type of record. Also, original files should never leave a closed file area making a reference area and/or copying capability necessary. Generally, closed file areas should only be used for very important records which are unique and would be extremely difficult to reconstruct in the event of a loss.

IDENTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Identification systems are an important part of any filing system. They include guides, folders, tabs and labels. Guides are primarily signposts. Without them, the record keeper would have to look at every paper in the file until the right one is found. Folders segregate papers into related groups behind the guides.

File Guides are used in the files to indicate the exact location of records and folders and to speed the accuracy of filing and finding. The guides show the main subdivisions and minor subdivisions. The purpose of the file guide is to lead the user to the file they are searching for.

File Folders are the backbone of any paper filing system. They can be inexpensive light weight manila stock when the retention period of records is not more than five years or for infrequently used records. When the records are used frequently, more durable folders are suggested. *A good general rule to follow is to use the least expensive folder required to maintain the records satisfactorily throughout their "life."* A folder should never be so good or so expensive that it cannot be destroyed along with the records it holds. Good basic folders have:

- Rounded corners at the tops to reduce paper cuts and dog-ears.
- The front flap cuts below the tab for easier reading.
- Three scored lines at the fold (1/4 inch apart) to allow 3/4 inch expansion without the tab being covered by the contents.

Folder Tab Locations can also be used to ease the process of searching for, and refiling records. File folders are available with several different tab location options. Drawer type folders (top tab) are available with up to five tab locations (straight cut, 1/2 cut, 1/3 cut, 1/4 cut and 1/5 cut) and shelf type folders (side tab) are available with up to three tab locations. The most popular top tab is the one-third cut, and the most popular side tab is the straight cut. Hanging type folders may have variable size tabs in up to five positions. Used properly, these can help make a file tab more visible and can also help organize files in a hierarchical system.

Tabs are the point of most wear. Folders are frequently pulled up by the tab and riffled through by the tabs. The tab is what rips or tears first. For medium use files it is best to get reinforced tabs that have an extra thickness on the tab and are worth the extra cost.

Labels. The first label read (file cabinets) is usually the drawer label. To assist the user, it should show:

- The file title or record series
- The years covered, or a distinction between active and inactive files

- The kind of filing arrangement the file follows
- The segment of the particular file included in that drawer.

The guide label (on a file guide) is normally the second label that is referred to. It should clearly give an idea of the contents of the folders which follow.

Care should be taken that the labels are prepared in a neat and uniform manner.

Color Coding systems also help reduce the area of search and aid in refiling and preventing misfiles. Color code systems vary from simple one color folders or labels to preprinted multicolored tabs. Color coding can be used with almost any file arrangement. The most important benefit of color coding is the limiting of misfiles. A color coded folder or tab stands out like the proverbial sore thumb when it is filed among unlike colors.

FILES MAINTENANCE

Maintaining files properly requires knowledge of filing methods frequently taken for granted. The following are some of the key procedures involved in good files maintenance:

When to File. Daily filing is better than weekly or other periodic filing. Records can be easily located and the chances of losing them are greatly reduced. Seeking the desired record in an accumulation of miscellaneous un-filed documents is slow and tedious work. The first step in daily filing is separating the documents into groups: those to be filed immediately, those to be discarded, and those requiring further action.

Those requiring further action include:

- Papers that are to be sent to another location for filing
- Papers to be circulated before filing
- Papers authorized to be destroyed
- Papers requiring follow-up or the collection of additional data.

Classification of all documents is the vital key to fast, efficient reference service. Documents are classified by noting the file designation (e.g., what they are to be filed under) on each document to be filed. That file designation will aid in returning the paper to its proper file each time it is removed.

Ideally the author or addressee will classify their correspondence. Otherwise, the record keeper must decide where to file the document. The case numbers or symbols can be highlighted by circling or underlining them. For case files arranged alphabetically, usually the significant words or phrases of the identification are underlined.

Subject files are the most difficult to classify because the record keeper must master the meaning of the subject topics before they can file under them. It also may be necessary to cross reference some documents.

Cross-Referencing should be used when the likelihood is great that a record will be referenced by something other than the feature by which it was filed. This is most common in case files filed by case number, but referred to by a name. But cross-referencing can also be used in subject files when correspondence has more than one possible subject or has some other outstanding feature by which it is likely to be referenced.

Cross-references should be prepared only when they are essential to retrieval needs. As a rule of thumb, cross-references should not be necessary on more than 10% of the papers interfiled into a subject file.

The simplest method of cross- referencing is the use of an extra copy. When classifying the papers both the primary reference and the cross-reference should be noted on the document. The normal file copy should be filed as usual and the extra copy should be filed under the cross reference.

Sorting. Papers to be filed by subject are sorted by main headings. Any resorting by subdivisions is done at the time the papers are inserted into the file folders. If the volume of papers to be filed is great and many subdivisions are used, the sorter might be subdivided to save time at the files.

Placing Papers in Folders. Documents should be placed in the folder with the latest dated material on top. Careful filing of papers into folders is always important. A careful look at the folder tab to see that the subject on it agrees with the subject coded on the paper will help to avoid misfiling. Unless the entire folder is charged out from the file, as case folders often are, fastening papers to folders with prong fasteners is unnecessary. This practice more than doubles the time required to place papers in the file.

Related Papers. These are papers which are directly related or contain reference to earlier papers on the same subject or transaction.

- *When to Combine Related Papers* - Combine papers of a later date which are directly related to or refer to papers of an earlier date only when reference requirements clearly require such action. Such papers as the following should be combined to assure complete documentation and to avoid split files: replies with the basic communication; changes in a policy or procedure with the policy or procedure that has been changed; and all papers regarding one individual, contract, etc. (commonly known as case files).
- *When Not to Combine Related Papers.* A reference in later papers to earlier papers does not necessarily require that the papers be combined. Do not combine such papers as recurring reports with the policy document requiring the report; applications with the policy document governing submission of the application; and papers on the same subject relating to different transactions, such as two different requisitions for filing supplies or reports of reviews of two different projects or organizations.
- *Combining Papers Dated in Different Years.* Frequently, there are papers which clearly relate to and should be combined with earlier papers which are included in a file of a previous year, i.e., cutoff file.

Remove the earlier related papers and file chronologically in the current file.

Folder Capacity. When the contents of any *standard folder* reach three-fourths inch (.75 inches) in thickness they should either be subdivided or the folder should be cut off. When cut off, the inclusive dates, that is the beginning and ending dates, of the contents should be added to the folder label. An identically labeled folder should be placed in the file immediately in front of the cut off folder. The cut off point should be a logical time such as the end of the month or a calendar quarter. New or additional files should be prepared immediately after the need for them is discovered.

Every folder label should be readily visible. When papers rise in the folder to obscure the folder label, the contents should be tamped down by gentle shaking. As folders become filled with papers, the scoring at the bottom of the front folder leaf should be creased to cause the papers to rest squarely on the bottom of the file container. However, folders should not be creased until the volume of papers requires it.

If the volume of documents in a typical folder consistently exceeds .75 inches, then some type of folder other than standard manila should be considered. File systems vendors have many types of folders available, including "accordion" types, and will be helpful in supplying samples and making recommendations.

Files Cut Off. Files must be cut off or closed out at some point in time. Cut off usually occurs on some event. For case files that event is the closing of the case (e.g., Highway Project Files are cut off at completion of the project; Personnel Files are cut off upon termination of employment). Non-case file records are usually cut off at the end of the calendar year or fiscal year, whichever is most applicable to the file.

Ninety percent (90%) of the records are never referred to after being filed. The other ten percent (10%) are needed to settle claims, check facts, settle invoice problems. Do not let old files fill valuable filing equipment and take up expensive office space. Transfer them to low cost storage boxes and move them to the State Records Center.

At least once a year record keepers are expected to dispose of records according to the retention and disposition schedule. To do so, the files must be cut off; inactive files must be transferred to the Records Center; and publication reference materials purged of obsolete items. Physically separating (cutting off) active from inactive records is basic to good file operation.

Chapter 5 - Filing Equipment

TYPES OF FILING EQUIPMENT

Most of the filing equipment used in today's offices is one of four basic types :

1. *vertical cabinets*
2. *lateral cabinets*
3. *shelves*
4. *mechanized shelves*

The following discusses these four basic types and considers the advantages and disadvantages of each type of equipment. Considerations in the selection of any filing equipment are:

- equipment costs
- retrieval speed
- space requirements
- filing features
- security

VERTICAL CABINETS

The vertical filing cabinet is the most common type of equipment used in individual offices. It is used primarily for filing correspondence and similar types of material. It is available in letter and legal sizes containing from two to five drawers. It is also available in drawer sizes to accommodate a variety of materials from 3" x 5" cards to large maps.

Vertical cabinets use the most floor space relative to their storage capacity. When figuring space requirements, there must be a minimum 44-inch aisle in front of the cabinet for drawer pullout and operator room. Considering the amount of floor space occupied, a two-drawer cabinet, which is often used as office furniture, is an extremely expensive way to store only 50 inches of files. Considering drawer extension and work space, a distance of six feet from the wall is required to access a file.

The four and five drawer letter and legal filing cabinets are the most popular sizes. The five drawer cabinet costs less per filing inch. Its filing capacity is 25% greater than a four drawer cabinet and requires no additional floor space.

A four drawer vertical letter size cabinet provides 100 filing inches and requires six square feet of floor space. A four drawer vertical legal size cabinet provides 100 filing inches per cabinet and requires eight square feet of floor space.

Five drawer cabinets are six inches higher than four drawer, but do not require any additional floor space. Please note that the height of a file cabinet must never exceed the practical height limitations of the shortest person expected to use the file cabinet. Step stools are not recommended around filing cabinets because they may present a falling hazard.

Filing is usually accomplished by placing folders front to back with the folder labels facing the operator.

Advantages:

- **Filing** - Vertical cabinets are very suitable for small record series (under 30 linear feet). They are particularly suitable for subject files because the order of filing and retrieving is usually done randomly, and the folder labels are easily read in these cabinets. Where the files require infrequent inter-filing, retrieving or updating, vertical cabinets are very efficient because documents can be added without withdrawing the folders. Alphabetic, subject, numeric and most other types of filing systems can be used in these units. However, this equipment does not lend itself for use with terminal digit filing systems.
- **Space and Cost** - In small, cramped offices with small storage requirements, a vertical cabinet often fills the need best. In such applications, the lowest cost per filing inch is achieved with vertical cabinets. This is particularly true when not more than one or two cabinets will ever be needed.
- **Mobility** - If the equipment is moved frequently, vertical cabinets are advantageous as they are relatively easy to move.
- **Security and Fire Protection** - Like the other types of enclosed equipment, vertical cabinets work well if there is a need for controlled access. The addition of locks increases the cost of the equipment and should be requested only when security protection is required by law. Cabinet locks, however, *do not* provide security, but merely controlled access. Fireproof cabinets are also available when essential records are stored in areas sensitive to fire. A standard vertical cabinet is not fireproof. If fire protection is required, specially constructed cabinets with insulation are available.

Disadvantages:

- **Filing** - Only one person at a time can retrieve files from a cabinet. This creates a problem in active files. Much more time is required to retrieve files from vertical cabinets than from other types of equipment. It is difficult for some personnel to see folders in the top drawer. Access to file series in cabinets is often more difficult than in open front equipment.
- **Space and Cost** - When the file series requires more than four or five cabinets, equipment and floor space costs are greater for vertical cabinets than for other equipment with comparable storage capacity. This is

due to the large aisle space required to access the equipment. Hanging files, very popular with this type of equipment, further decrease the filing capacity of these cabinets.

LATERAL CABINETS

Lateral cabinets are among the most versatile of all filing equipment. A lateral cabinet may be used for both letter and legal size files. In addition to having pull out drawers, they can be designed to have shelves, either pull out or fixed, and doors. Using these combinations, the cabinet configurations can be tailor made to specific office needs.

These cabinets are usually 15 inches deep and come in widths of 30, 36, and 42 inches. The cabinets require a 30-inch aisle for drawer pull out and operator room and a total space of 48 inches for cabinet and aisle.

The 30-inch letter/legal five drawer lateral cabinet provides 150 filing inches per cabinet and requires approximately 9 square feet of floor space. The 42-inch letter/legal five- drawer lateral file will provide 60 more filing inches. The five drawer unit is 12 inches higher than the four drawer unit and requires 13 square feet of floor space. The 36- inch letter/ legal five drawer lateral file provides 180 filing inches per cabinet and requires approximately 11 square feet of floor space.

Folders are usually filed left to right as in a shelf filing arrangement. In the models with pull out drawers, records can be filed with drawer dividers, in a left to right arrangement.

Advantages:

- **Filing** - Lateral cabinets present many advantages in filing because of the versatility of the shelves and drawers available. Folders can be filed left to right with outside edge easily marked for either a color coding or a terminal digit filing system. Alphabetic, numeric or subject filing systems may be used with equal ease.
- **Mobility** - Lateral cabinets are relatively easy to move.
- **Security and Fire Protection** - Like the other types of enclosed equipment, lateral cabinets work well if there is a need for controlled access. Locks may be added to the lateral cabinets at an increased price but should be requested only when security protection is required by law or regulation. Cabinet locks, however, do not provide security, but merely controlled access. Special fireproof lateral cabinets are available for those applications which warrant such protection.

Disadvantages:

- **Filing** - Lateral cabinets with pull out drawers provide slower retrieval because drawers must be pulled out to access records. Some filing personnel may find it difficult to see into the top drawer of a five-drawer cabinet. Fixed-shelf lateral equipment is not as compatible with subject files as a drawer file.
- **Space and Cost** - Lateral cabinets are not economical in terms of cost or space. The cabinets cost more per filing inch than either vertical cabinets or shelves. They use more floor space per filing inch than either shelves or letter size vertical cabinets. Lateral cabinets are more economical in terms of floor space than legal-size vertical cabinets; however, the equipment cost still outweighs the floor savings. Only with fixed shelves are lateral cabinets less expensive than vertical, but even then they are more expensive than shelf filing equipment.

SHELF FILE EQUIPMENT

Shelf filing is a method of storing records on horizontal shelves rather than in closed drawers. Shelf units are designed specifically with filing in mind. The folders are arranged in rows with the tabs to the outside for ease in reading.

Shelf filing is available with fixed or adjustable shelves. Adjustable shelves are generally preferred as they can be adapted to meet changes in the records created. Either type can be equipped with doors to provide controlled access. The inclusion of doors and locks will double the cost of a unit.

This equipment is particularly suited to files where an entire folder is retrieved intact. Retrieval speed is efficient with both alphabetic and numeric filing systems. Terminal digit filing for large case file series is extremely compatible with this equipment.

This type of equipment is the most economical of all available filing units and can provide the answer to many filing problems stemming from rising costs, lack of floor space, and inefficient records retrieval.

Advantages:

- **Costs** - Shelving without doors is the least expensive of all filing equipment, usually costing 30% less than other non-motorized filing equipment housing an equal volume of records.
- **Space** - Shelving requires less floor space than most other types of equipment. Normally, it will save between 25% and 50% of the floor space required by other types of equipment containing a comparable quantity of records. For example, a shelf unit 36" x 15" will require a minimum of 4-1/2 square feet of floor space as opposed to a minimum of six square feet for a vertical cabinet.
- **Filing** - There are many advantages to open-shelf filing. The absence of drawers to open and close saves labor and provides much faster access to records. The exposed records facilitate better file control with easy visual checks and inventories. The removal and replacement of file folders is 20% to 30% faster with shelf units than with vertical or lateral cabinets. Open shelving also aids in allowing files personnel to develop "location sense," the ability to know on sight the exact location of a particular file folder. *Shelf filing equipment is the only equipment that allows multiple-user access to the file.* Open shelves are the most desirable equipment to prevent the build-up of dust on records. Because the air can circulate over the file, the dust is carried away. With closed-drawer units, the dust is trapped and the lack of air circulation can allow mold and mildew to develop on the records.

Disadvantages:

- **Mobility** - Because of its size and structure, shelving is generally more difficult to move than vertical and lateral cabinets, unless it is disassembled. There are some fixed shelving units which can be moved without disassembly.
- **Security and Susceptibility to Damage** Records stored on shelving units without doors are more susceptible to fire and water damage. Shelving does not provide controlled access to the records to the extent closed equipment does. The addition of doors and locks doubles the cost of the equipment. Doors and locks should, therefore, be ordered only when security protection is required by law. Securing the entire room housing an open system is the most practical solution for controlled access.

MECHANIZED FILE EQUIPMENT

Mechanized filing equipment is a form of filing equipment in which records are accessed by mechanical means. Mechanized files are different from most conventional filing equipment in that the file is brought to the operator mechanically rather than the operator's going to the file. Mechanized files are available in the two basic vertical and horizontal configurations. They are available with letter or legal size shelves for lateral filing, with letter or legal size trays for front-to-back filing or with a variety of trays for cards. When the application requires it, units may be equipped with a combination of letter, legal shelves, letter, legal trays or card trays. The cost of this equipment varies greatly both in equipment cost and floor space, with compactible shelving being the least expensive and vertical power files the most expensive. However, any mechanized equipment is usually more expensive than non-mechanized and should be carefully evaluated before being recommended.

Although there have been many variations on mechanized filing in the past there are two types most commonly used today, compactible shelving and sliding track shelving. Both of these types are primarily used to provide high density storage.

COMPACTIBLE SHELVES

Compactible shelving (movable aisle) consists of modules of shelving which are placed on tracks, allowing a range of shelving to be opened for filing and retrieving records. Records are retrieved by the operator's going to a range of shelving, cranking the units or pressing a selector button and the range automatically opens, creating an aisle. The operator can then enter the aisle and retrieve the selected record. Refiling is accomplished in the same manner. There are no restrictions on the size of modules for automated units. Module size is determined by the access aisles required. File arrangements that are compatible with regular shelf filing are easily adapted to this equipment.

This same style of equipment is available in manual or mechanical assist (non electric) configuration. It is the same in all respects except that the searcher pushes or cranks the shelving units apart manually, to create the aisle. This configuration is good for small installations, (1 or 2 sections deep, less than 4 ranges or 5 sections deep up to 10 ranges for mechanical) where the reference rate is relatively low and the need for space is critical. This style is less expensive than the electrical version.

Advantages:

- **Space** -- Where space is *the* critical factor, compactible shelving may offer a practical solution. This equipment usually saves about 1/2 of the required space of fixed shelving units of the same capacity.
- **Security** -- When the units are closed and the power shut off or units locked, compactible shelves offer good controlled access.

Disadvantages:

- **Access** -- Retrieval is slower because the operator must select the range desired and then wait for the ranges to move and create an aisle. With limited aisle space, few files are available for retrieval at any one time.
- **Costs** -- Compactible shelving is two or three times as expensive as fixed shelving of the same capacity. Despite the savings in floor space, it may require up to 15 years of use to recover the difference in original equipment expenditure between compactible shelves and fixed. A maintenance contract for motorized shelving is usually purchased which further increases the operating cost. Manual systems cost less and are less costly to operate.
- **Physical Liabilities** -- These units run on rails which require tracks and ramp plates be laid on the floor. The weight loading on the floor must be considered.
- **Mobility** -- These units must be disassembled, the rails pulled up and reinstalled and the units reassembled to move these units from one office to another. Each new site must be re evaluated for structural suitability for the equipment.

SLIDING TRACK SHELVING

Sliding track shelving was originally designed for very confined spaces including closets and storage rooms. It generally consists of a row of shelving, usually placed against a wall. There are then one or two rows of shelving placed on tracks in front of the base unit. These rows have one or two fewer shelving units than the base unit, and can be moved laterally to expose the shelving behind.

Advantages:

- **Space** -- As with compactible shelving space savings is the primary advantage for sliding track systems. In particular the ability to place a decent number of files into very restricted areas including closets and storage rooms.

Disadvantages:

- **Access** – Retrieval usually requires moving one or more shelf units laterally on their tracks to expose the unit containing the file being searched for.
- **Costs** – Sliding track systems cost more than the equivalent of plain shelf filing equipment.
- **Range Limitations** – Sliding track systems are generally useful in small filing situations. The practical limit is two tracks in front of the base unit and the longer the base unit the more openings must be left in the track units to easily accommodate accessing the records in the back.
- **Physical Liabilities** – As with compactible shelving, tracks and ramp plates must be laid down and a relatively high weight load is being placed on the floor, although these considerations are not as extreme as with compactible shelving.
- **Mobility** -- These units must be disassembled, the rails pulled up and reinstalled and the units reassembled to move these units from one office to another. Each new site must be re evaluated for structural suitability for the equipment.

CONSIDERATION IN SELECTING EQUIPMENT

There are many considerations involved in the selection of filing equipment. There is no one "best" type of equipment; rather, each filing system or operation should determine the type equipment selected to house those particular records. The Records Management Division will provide information and assistance in selecting the right type of equipment for particular filing needs.

The most important consideration is access. Since records are filed so that they can be referenced, retrieval of the information should be a foremost consideration. In describing the various kinds of equipment in this manual, retrieval features have been mentioned. When selecting equipment, these features must be matched to the particular type of record kept and to the filing system. The records should be as open as possible, located near the users, and have the potential to be used by several people simultaneously.

Personnel productivity is also important. Once access requirements are satisfied, equipment should be selected and arranged to eliminate non- productive operations. Walking to and from files, waiting for access, (opening and closing drawers, climbing stools or ladders is nonproductive). Direct and indirect labor costs account for approximately 75% of all filing costs.

Security is another consideration in acquiring equipment. With the exception of shelving without doors, all of the basic equipment described in this manual can be equipped with locks to provide controlled access. The addition of locks, however, is the least effective method of providing security. Most locks on filing equipment can be readily opened with a paper clip or nail file, and master keys are available which will open practically all locks made by one manufacturer. A locked drawer or shelf will only keep out the curious. The addition of locks substantially increases the cost of the equipment.

If security of a file is a paramount consideration, the best and least expensive method is to secure the entire file area and restrict access to the files.

Equipment costs and space requirements are also important considerations. In general, if cost is the primary concern, shelf files are by far the least expensive for a volume of records. If space, particularly costly space, is the primary concern then compactible shelves are in order.

POSITIONING AND USING EQUIPMENT

Once the proper equipment has been selected and acquired for an efficient, well-organized records system, the final step is to position the equipment to attain maximum efficiency. The following guidelines will assist in proper utilization of filing equipment:

- Filing areas should be as well-lighted and ventilated as other parts of the office.
- Locate the files as conveniently as possible to the people who use them and to the office they serve. This usually entails utilizing a decentralized file plan (i.e., locating the records system in the area where the files are created and used). A well-situated file will save considerable filing time and improve operating effectiveness.
- The convenient location of records must provide a workflow that follows straight lines for a minimum of travel, backtracking, and cross- movements. The less time filing personnel have to spend in moving back and forth to the files, the more time they will have to devote to their assigned duties.
- Files requiring the closest attention and concentration should be away from excessive noise and movement. Confidential material should be kept away from doors, windows, and other non-security files to minimize unauthorized access.
- Filing equipment should only be used for record keeping purposes. The use of filing equipment to store office supplies, purses, coffee cups, umbrellas and other extraneous items is a wasteful use of valuable filing space. For storage of these materials, it is more economical to purchase proper storage equipment. The only exception is that extraneous material may be placed in filing equipment when that space is not required for files. New equipment should not be ordered when existing equipment is used for other than records storage.